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# Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945

Dana L. Robert

From December 12 to 29, 1938, the most representative meeting of world Protestantism to date took place in Tambaram, India. Under the gathering storm clouds of World War II, with parts of China already under Japanese occupation, Hitler triumphant in the Sudetenland, and Stalinism in full swing, 471 persons from 69 different countries met at Madras Christian College for the second decennial meeting of the International Missionary Council.

For the first time, African Christians from different parts of the continent met each other. The African delegation traveled together for weeks on a steamer that proceeded from West Africa to Cape Town, and around the Cape of Good Hope to India. China, besieged by Japan and torn asunder by competing warlords, nationalists and Communists, sent forty-nine official delegates, of whom nearly two-thirds were nationals and only one-third were missionaries. The women's missionary movement, then at the height of its influence, pushed for full representation by women at Madras. Their persistence was rewarded with sixty women delegates sent by their national Christian councils, and another ten women in attendance by invitation. Europeans whose countries would soon be at war worked together in committee, as common Christian commitment overrode the tensions among Belgians, Danes, French, Germans, British, Dutch, Norwegians, and others.

The central theme that drew so many to India at a time of multiple global crises was "the upbuilding of the younger churches as a part of the historic universal Christian community."<sup>1</sup> With Protestant missions bearing fruit in many parts of the world, the time was ripe for younger non-Western churches to take their places alongside older Western denominations in joint consideration of the universal church's faith, witness, social realities, and responsibilities. The roster of attendees reads like a who's who of mid-twentieth-century world Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the 1938 IMC conference was a gathering of visionaries, for the global Christianity it embraced was a skeleton without flesh or bulk, a mission-educated minority who were leading nascent Christian institutions. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Europeans dominated the world church, with approximately 70.6 percent of the world's Christian population. By 1938, on the eve of World War II, the apparent European domination of Protestantism and Catholicism remained strong. Yet by the end of the twentieth century, the European percentage of world Christianity had shrunk to 28 percent of the total; Latin America and Africa combined provided 43 percent of the world's Christians. Although North Americans became the backbone of the cross-cultural mission force after World War II, their numerical dominance was being overtaken by missionaries from the very countries that were considered mission fields only fifty years before. The typical late twentieth-century Christian was no longer a European man, but a Latin American or African woman.<sup>3</sup> The skeleton of 1938 had grown organs and sinew.

This article paints in broad strokes the transformation of world Christianity since the Second World War—a massive cultural and geographic shift away from Europeans and their descendants toward peoples of the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>4</sup> The

shift southward began early in the century, and the 1938 missionary conference was vivid proof of powerful indigenous Christian leadership in both church and state, despite a missionary movement trapped within colonialist structures and attitudes. But after World War II, rising movements of political and ecclesiastical self-determination materially changed the context in which non-Western churches operated, thereby allowing Christianity to blossom in multiple cultures. After examining the changing political context in which the growth of global Christianity took place, this essay will give examples of the emerging Christian movement and then comment on the challenge for historians posed by the seismic shift in Christian identity.

## Christianity and Nationalism

Besides laying waste to Europe, North Africa, and western Asia, the Second World War revealed the rotten underbelly of European imperialism. In the new postwar political climate, long-simmering nationalist movements finally succeeded in throwing off direct European rule. With the newly formed United Nations supporting the rights of peoples to self-determination, one country after another reverted to local control. In 1947 India obtained its freedom from Britain, beginning a process of decolonization that continued with Burma in 1948, Ghana in 1957, Nigeria in 1960, Kenya in 1963, and on around the globe. British policies of indirect rule promoted orderly transitions in some places, but left open sores in others, for example in Sudan, where the Islamic north was left to govern the traditionalist and Christian south in 1956. Having introduced Western democratic institutions, the United States released the Philippines in 1946. Colonial powers such as Holland, France, and Portugal resisted the nationalist tide, ultimately to no avail. The Belgians were so angry at losing their colonies that they literally tore the phones off the walls in the Congo, leaving the colonial infrastructure in ruins. The French departed Algeria after six years of fighting the independence movement. Only a coup d'état in Portugal finally persuaded the Portuguese to free Angola and Mozambique in 1975, which, like many countries, erupted into civil war once the Europeans had departed. Different ethnic and political groups that had previously cooperated in opposition to European imperialism now found themselves fighting over control of nations whose boundaries, size, and even political systems had been created by foreigners. The success of anti-imperialist independence movements, with subsequent internal struggles for control in dozens of fledgling nation-states, was the most significant political factor affecting the growth of non-Western Christianity in the decades following World War II.

To understand why decolonization profoundly affected the state of Christianity in the non-Western world, one must explore the prior ambiguous relationship between Western missions and European imperialism. On the one hand, although missionary work often predated the coming of Western control, imperialism's arrival inevitably placed missions within an oppressive political context that they sometimes exploited for their own benefit. In China, for example, the unequal treaties of 1842 and 1858 permitted missions to operate in selected port cities and to buy land. Foreign missions in China benefited from extraterritoriality, whereby they were not subject to Chinese laws and regulations.

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In colonial Africa, missions received land grants. For example, in 1898 Cecil Rhodes awarded 13,000 acres to American Methodists for their Rhodesian Mission. Sometimes, however, the missionaries themselves stood between the indigenous peoples and their exploitation by Europeans. French Protestant missionary Maurice Leenhardt defended the land rights of the Kanaks in face of overwhelming pressure from French colonialists in New Caledonia. Presbyterian missionaries William Sheppard and William Morrison faced trial in 1909 for exposing the atrocities perpetrated on rubber gatherers in the Belgian Congo. While courageous individual missionaries mitigated the effects of imperialism on indigenous peoples, by and large the missions benefited materially from European control. Most missionaries saw themselves as apolitical and preferred the status quo of colonialism to the uncertainties of nationalist revolution.

Another important factor in understanding the ambiguous relationship between missions and imperialism before decolonization was the importance of missionary schools. Christian missions pioneered Western learning in the non-Western world. In 1935 missions were running nearly 57,000 schools throughout the world, including more than one hundred colleges. Mission schools promoted literacy in both European lan-

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guages and vernaculars, and they spread Western ideals of democratic governance, individual rights, and the educability of women and girls. Despite their limitations, missions through education provided local leadership with the tools it needed to challenge foreign oppression. The Christian contribution to Asian nationalism was extremely significant, especially through the impact of mission schools. Korea, for example, was colonized by the Japanese in 1910. At that time, mission schools were the only form of modern education in the country. In 1911 the Japanese military police accused students at a Presbyterian school of plotting to assassinate the Japanese governor-general. The police arrested 123 Koreans for conspiracy, 105 of whom were Christian nationalists. In 1919, thirty-three Koreans signed the Korean Declaration of Independence. Fifteen signatories were Christians, even though Christians represented only 1 percent of the total population.<sup>5</sup> Mission education, which combined vernacular literacy with Western learning, clearly played a key role in equipping nationalist leadership.

The role of mission schools in creating nationalist leadership was important not only in Asia, but also in Africa. Missions founded schools before those of colonial governments, including the first higher education for Africans in 1827 at Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, and higher education for South Africans at Fort Hare in 1916. By the Second World War, mission churches in Africa had produced a Christian elite poised to found independent governments. When independence came, even though Christianity was a minority religion, its adherents played a much larger role than their numbers warranted. Most black African leaders were churchmen. Kenneth Kaunda, first president of Zambia, was the son of a Presbyterian minister. Hastings Banda, first president of Malawi, received his early education in a

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mission school and attended college in the United States. Kwame Nkrumah, first president of Ghana, attended Catholic mission schools and began his career teaching in them. Leopold Senghor studied for the priesthood before entering politics and becoming first president of Senegal. Similarly, Julius Nyerere, first prime minister of Tanzania, both studied and taught in Catholic mission schools. Not only did mission schools train many nationalist leaders, but church-related institutions provided opportunities for developing indigenous leadership.

After World War II, with the process from decolonization to independence in full swing, Christianity in the non-Western world faced an entirely new context. In 1954, leading East Asian Christians wrote a volume entitled *Christianity and the Asian Revolution*. Reflecting on the social convulsions of the twentieth century, the Christian leaders defined the "Asian Revolution" not only as a reaction against European colonialism but also as a search for human rights and economic and social justice, ideas obtained from the West itself. The authors noted, "As the American colonists revolted in the name of English justice against British rule, so Asians, in the name of political and social doctrines which originated in large part in Europe and America, revolted against European colonialism."<sup>6</sup> The rejection of colonialism by Asian and African Christians included rejecting Western missionary paternalism, with its Eurocentrism and moral superiority.<sup>7</sup> From the 1950s through the 1970s, as nations shook off the legacy of European domination, churches around the world accused Western missionaries of paternalism, racism, and cultural imperialism. The refrain "Missionary, Go Home!" reached its peak in the early 1970s. In 1971 Christian leaders in the Philippines, Kenya, and Argentina called for a moratorium on missionaries to end the dependence of the younger churches on the older ones. In 1974 the All Africa Conference of Churches, meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, called for a moratorium on Western missionaries and money sent to Africa, because of the belief that foreign assistance created dependency and stifled African leadership.

The cries for moratorium from Latin American, Asian, and African Christians shocked the Western missionary movement. But indigenous Christian protests against Western mission were insignificant compared with the wholesale rejection of Christianity that occurred within revolutionary movements led by non-Christians. At the International Missionary Council meeting of 1938, the largest delegations of Asian Christians came from the countries with the largest Western-style Christian infrastructures: India and China. Both Indian and Chinese Christianity boasted national Christian councils under indigenous leadership; both enjoyed thriving ecumenical movements that supported organic church unions; both hosted a range of Christian colleges and hospitals. Ironically, anti-Christian backlashes raged in both countries. Because Christianity was a minority religion in both China and India, its association with European domination widely discredited it as dangerous and foreign in the eyes of the majority non-Christians. Despite a community that traced its founding to the apostle Thomas, most Indian Christians were outcasts, members of ethnic groups despised in Hindu society. Practicing a double discrimination against both Christianity and low caste status, the postcolonial Indian government excluded Christian Dalits (outcasts) from the affirmative-action programs guaranteed to other ethnic minorities. The government of India began denying visas to missionaries in 1964, and Christians faced ongoing discrimination and intermittent persecution in both India and Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

In China, the place of the largest Western missionary invest-

ment in the early twentieth century, accession to power by the Communists in 1949 condemned Christianity as the religion of the colonialist oppressor. Chinese churches became sites for Marxist struggle against the "opium of the people." In 1950 the Communist government organized Chinese Protestants into the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Catholics into the Catholic Patriotic Association. Under theologian Y. T. Wu, who had attended the Madras IMC meeting in 1938, the Three-Self Movement published the Christian Manifesto, which stated that missionary Christianity was connected with Western imperialism and that the United States used religion to support reactionary political forces. The document called for Chinese Christians immediately to become self-reliant and separate from all Western institutions.<sup>9</sup> The Three-Self Movement began holding meetings at which Christian leaders were accused of betraying the Chinese people and were sent to labor camps for "reeducation." With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the remaining foreign missionaries left China, for their presence was endangering the Chinese Christian community. The few missionaries who did not leave were imprisoned along with many leading Chinese Christians. The worst suffering of Chinese Christians occurred from 1966 to 1976 during the Cultural Revolution, a period in which no public worship was permitted in China. The very schools and hospitals that had seemed like the best contribution of foreign missions to China were held up as the proof of missionary imperialism and foreign domination of Christianity. Millions of Chinese died as the government encouraged the

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destruction of all things religious or traditional. Except for a catacombs church of unknown strength, it seemed to China watchers in the 1970s that the Communist dictatorship had destroyed Chinese Christianity.

In parts of Africa, anticolonial movements sometimes took an anti-Christian stance. Nationalist leaders accused missions of telling Africans to pray and then stealing their land while their heads were bowed. Despite having been a resident mission pupil in childhood, Jomo Kenyatta, leader of the anti-Christian, pro-independence Mau-Mau rebellion in Kenya during the 1950s and later the country's first president, accused missionaries of trying to destroy African culture. During the Mau-Mau liberation struggle, which mobilized African traditional religion against Christianity, rebels killed African Christians who refused to drink the goats' blood and other sacrifices of the pro-independence cult. During the cold war, Marxist ideology as well as funding from the Soviet Union and China began playing a role in African conflicts. Following the Cuban example, Communist-funded movements in Mozambique and Angola dismantled mission schools and attacked churches as supposed organs of capitalism and European religion.

By the 1970s, on a political and ideological level, world Christianity seemed in disarray. Although mission education, literacy training, and ideals of individual human worth had

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provided tools that initiated intellectual leadership of independence movements in Asia and Africa, the perceived alliance of foreign missions with European domination branded Christianity a henchman of colonialism. In the West, reacting against the colonial legacy, scholars and historians similarly indicted Christian missions as a tool of Western domination. As far as Western intellectuals were concerned, the non-Western Christian was a mercenary “rice Christian,” and the missionary as outdated as a dinosaur. The teaching of missions and world Christianity began disappearing from colleges and seminaries, a casualty of the Vietnam-era rejection of “culture Christianity” and Western domination in world affairs. With indigenous church leaders calling for moratoriums on missionaries, Western mainline churches became highly self-critical and guilt-ridden. Attempting to shift from paternalistic to partnership models of mission, they began cutting back on Western missionary personnel. During the long process from decolonization to independence, scholars, politicians, and leading ecclesiastics branded both Western missions and world Christianity failures because of their perceived social, theological, and political captivity to the despised colonialist interests.

### Revival and Renewal in World Christianity

The irony of world Christianity from the Second World War through the 1970s was that even as scholars were writing books implicating Christianity in European imperialism, the number of believers began growing rapidly throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Perhaps if historians in the sixties and seventies had been studying Christianity as a people’s movement rather than a political one, they might have noticed that growth among the grass roots did not mirror the criticisms of intellectual elites. The process of decolonization and independence began severing the connection between Christianity and European colonialism. The repudiation of missionary paternalism, combined with expanding indigenous initiatives, freed Christianity to become more at home in local situations.

Another fallacy of treating Christianity as a politicized Western movement is that scholarship ignored the way in which ordinary people were receiving the gospel message and retranslating it into cultural modes that fitted their worldviews and met their needs.<sup>10</sup> In retrospect it is evident that even during the colonial period, indigenous Christians—Bible women, evangelists, catechists, and prophets—were all along the most effective interpreters of Christianity to their own people. The explosion of non-Western Christianity was possible because Christianity was already being indigenized before the colonizers departed.

In the uncertainty of postcolonial situations, in the midst of civil strife and ethnic tensions in emerging nations, indigenous forms of Christianity spread quietly and quickly. Even in the so-called mission denominations, native leaders took over and indigenized positions held formerly by Western missionaries. In Kenya, for example, Mau-Mau rebels targeted Anglicanism as the religion of the colonizers during the 1950s. But after Mau-Mau, independence, and the subsequent instability of a struggling government, Anglicanism in Kenya emerged even stronger, with exponential growth among the Kikuyu from the 1970s onward. Not only was Anglicanism now led by Kenyan bishops and priests, but the new context transformed the liability of being an English religion under a colonial government into the advantage of being a global faith under an independent government. In the 1980s and 1990s, as political and economic institutions began collapsing under corrupt one-party dictatorships, the church

became one of the few institutions with the moral authority and international connections to oppose the government, which it did on occasion. In some parts of Africa, the church’s infrastructures and international connections provided more stability for supporting daily life than did the government.<sup>11</sup> The postindependence growth of Anglicanism occurred so steadily throughout former British colonies that Africa is now the continent with the most Anglicans. At the 1998 Lambeth Conference, the highest consultative body of the Anglican Communion, 224 of the 735 bishops were from Africa, compared with only 139 from the United Kingdom and Europe.<sup>12</sup> Anglicans in Nigeria report 17 million baptized members, compared with 2.8 million in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Given its brutal suppression under Communism after 1949, the Chinese church provides the most stirring illustration of the resilience of Asian Christianity. In 1979 five thousand Chinese

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Christians attended the first public worship service allowed since 1966. By suffering under Communism along with other citizens, Chinese Christians proved they were not the “running dogs” of imperialists but were truly Chinese citizens. With the end of the Cultural Revolution, Christians began reclaiming buildings that had previously been seized. The China Christian Council opened thirteen theological seminaries and began printing Bibles, creating a hymnal, and training pastors for churches that had gone without resources for fifteen years. Recent scholarship estimates that on the eve of the Communist takeover, one-fourth of all Chinese Christians were already members of indigenous, independent Chinese churches.<sup>14</sup> It was these indigenized forms of Christianity that provided the most resistance to Communist domination of the churches. Biblically literalist, directly dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit, and emerging from the religious sensibilities of popular Chinese religion, indigenized forms of Chinese Christianity grew the most under Communist persecution. What had been 700,000 Protestants in 1949 grew to between 12 and 36 million Protestants by the end of the century.<sup>15</sup> In addition to government-approved churches, millions of Chinese Christians meet in house churches characterized by spontaneous spoken prayer, singing and fellowship, miraculous healing, exorcisms of evil spirits, and love and charity to neighbors.

The translation of Christianity into African cultures was most obvious in the life and work of so-called African Independent or African Initiated Churches (AICs), defined by Harold Turner as churches founded in Africa, by Africans, primarily for Africans. By 1984 Africans had founded seven thousand independent, indigenous denominations in forty-three countries across the continent. By the 1990s over 40 percent of black Christians in South Africa were members of AICs. Chafing under white domination and racism, African-led movements began breaking off from mission churches in the 1880s. The earliest independent churches emphasized African nationalism in ecclesiastical affairs. They received the name “Ethiopian” in 1892 when a Methodist minister, Mangena Mokone, founded the

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ing in a movement to heal the earth through planting trees—750,000 trees in 1997 alone.<sup>18</sup> Spirit churches spread rapidly following political independence because they translated the Christian faith into African cultures, thereby both transforming the cultural forms and expanding the meaning of the Gospel as received from Western missionaries. Spirit churches also spread because they mount vigorous missionary movements, sending out evangelistic teams that dance through the villages, singing, praying, preaching, healing, and drawing people into a vigorous worship life.

Another momentous change in the world church since the 1960s can be traced to the renewal of Catholicism, the largest branch of Christianity with approximately 980 million members in 1996. The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) brought to Rome the Catholic bishops, who together voted major changes in Catholicism's theological self-definition, customs, and attitudes. As these bishops returned to their homelands, they began putting into practice the idea of the church as the people of God, with Mass said in the vernacular and a new openness to current sociocultural realities. In particular, the more than 600 Latin American bishops who attended the Vatican Council gained a new sense of their potential as the numerically largest block of Catholics in the world. Latin American bishops reflected on their common social problems—stark division between rich and poor, takeovers by military dictatorships, and a legacy of a church that took the side of the rich. At the meeting of Latin American bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, the bishops evaluated the social context of their continent and spoke with a powerful voice against the dependence of Latin America on the industrialized North—a dependence that perpetuated the poverty of the South. Calling the church to take the side of the poor, the bishops supported a new "theology of liberation."<sup>19</sup>

The "renewed commitment to democracy and human rights in the Catholic Church" supported a wave of democracy throughout Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Philippines during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

The movement toward democracy in traditionally Roman Catholic countries was not universally acclaimed by the church, as the route often entailed violent rebellion and upheaval of the status quo. The theology of liberation immediately came into conflict with powerful military dictatorships, which began persecuting the church. Militaries martyred an estimated 850 bishops, priests, and nuns in Latin America during the 1970s and early 1980s. Military governments targeted church leaders at all levels because they were conscientizing the poor—teaching them to read and defending their human rights. The Roman Catholic Church in Latin America gained a vitality it had long lacked as laypeople began meeting in Base Christian Communities, which functioned as Bible study groups that reflected on the relationship between the church as community and social injustices. But as the theology of liberation confronted the social and political power structures in Latin America, the Catholic Church became divided between those who supported liberation theology among the "people of God" and those more conservative, who felt the nature of the church was more hierarchical and otherworldly.

The renewal of Catholicism in Latin America since the Second Vatican Council underscores a major tension in the growth of non-Western Christianity since the mid-twentieth century: the forms and structures for the growth of late twentieth-century Christianity could not be contained within either the institutional or the theological frameworks of Western Christianity. The Base Christian Communities, for example, introduced Bible study and a more intense spirituality into what had been

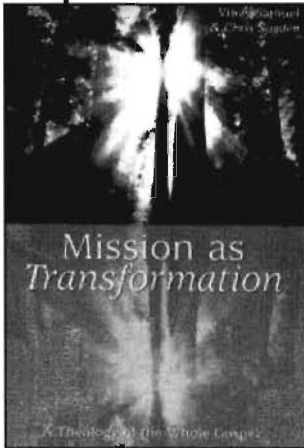
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Ethiopian Church in the Witwatersrand region of South Africa. Believing that Africans should lead their own churches, Mokone cited Psalm 68:31: "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God."<sup>16</sup> During the early twentieth century, important African prophets and evangelists emerged throughout the continent, often to be arrested and persecuted by colonial authorities who deemed spiritual independence a dangerous precursor to political independence.

By the mid-twentieth century, the largest group of AICs were known as Spirit churches, often called Aladura in western Africa and Zionist in southern Africa.<sup>17</sup> Spirit churches were characterized by a prophetic leader, a high emphasis on the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal phenomena such as speaking in tongues and exorcisms, and often a holy city or "Zion" as headquarters. With Bible translation into many African languages, prophetic African leaders interpreted the Scriptures for themselves in line with African cultural practices. Zionists, for example, permit polygamy, which exists both in the Bible and in traditional African cultures. Their leaders rely on dreams and visions for divine inspiration—also both a biblical and traditional African practice. Many people are attracted to AICs because they focus on healing the body and spirit through prayers, laying on of hands, and administration of holy water and other remedies. Women healers treat barren women and other sufferers, providing respite for them in healing colonies. In Zimbabwe more than 150 indigenous churches have extended the metaphor of healing by join-

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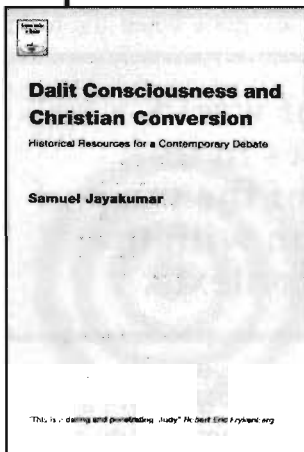
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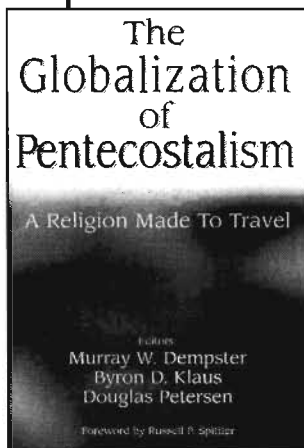
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nominal Catholic practice. Faced with the severe shortage of priests, Latin American Catholics, once they became used to reading the Bible for themselves, began forming their own churches and breaking away from Catholicism. Ironically, the liberation theologies of the Base Christian Communities may have created heightened expectations that could not be fulfilled, and disillusioned Catholics began founding their own churches. Protestant growth has become so rapid in Latin America that scholars have predicted that Protestants, notably of Pentecostal persuasion, could constitute a third of the Latin American population by the year 2010, with their greatest strengths in Guatemala, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Brazil, and Honduras.<sup>21</sup> These new Protestants are founding their own churches, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a Pentecostal group begun in the late 1970s by Edir Macedo de Bezerra. By 1990 this home-grown denomination had 800 churches with two million worshippers led by 2,000 pastors throughout Latin America. Neither Catholicism nor the classic churches of the Protestant Reformation can contain the vitality of Latin American Christianity today.

Reasons for the revival and renewal of global Christianity today are too complex and diverse to be encapsulated in a brief essay. In addition to increasing indigenization within a postcolonial political framework, many sociological factors affect church growth, including urbanization, dislocation caused by war and violence, ethnic identity, the globalizing impact of cyberspace, and local circumstances. Political contexts differ widely for Christian communities around the world. Nevertheless, Christianity throughout the non-Western world has in common an indigenous, grassroots leadership; embeddedness in local cultures; and reliance on a vernacular Bible. Where Christianity is growing in the South, it supports stable family and community life for peoples suffering political uncertainty and economic hardships. The time when Christianity was the religion of European colonial oppressors fades ever more rapidly into the past.

## A Global/Local Christian Fabric

As Christianity shifts southward, the nature of Christianity itself evolves. The movement of the faith from one culture to another typically has caused a major change in the self-understanding and cultural grounding of the Christian movement.<sup>22</sup> Past cultural shifts occurred when Christianity moved from a Hebrew to a Greco-Roman milieu, and then from a Mediterranean to a European framework. With the voyages of discovery, Europeans began exporting their religion in the late 1400s. At that time Christian expansion was partly a function of the state, reflecting the Christendom model of church/state relations. Even the voluntarism of Protestant missions occurred within a largely Christendom model. But the end of European colonialism after the Second World War accompanied a decline of European religiosity relative to the rest of the world. The virtual destruction of Russian Orthodoxy under the Communist regime was also a major factor in the elimination of the Christendom model.

Now much of the dynamism within world Christianity is occurring below the equator. As Christianity shifts southward, the interpretations of Christianity by people in Latin America, Africa, and southern Asia are coming to the fore. This changing face of the world church also brings new interpretive challenges for historians.

One of the knottiest interpretive problems in understanding Christianity today is the tension between a worldwide commu-

nity of people who call themselves Christians and a multitude of local movements for whom Christianity represents a particular culture's grappling with the nature of divine reality. Christianity is a world religion with a basic belief that God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ, whose adherents are spread throughout the globe. Yet as Lamin Sanneh has so cogently argued, by virtue of its use of the vernacular in speaking of God and in spreading the Scriptures, Christianity has translated or incarnated itself into local cultures.<sup>23</sup> What at first glance appears to be the largest world religion is in fact the ultimate local religion. Indigenous words for God and ancient forms of spirituality have all become part of Christianity. Flexibility at the local level, combined with being part of an international network, is a major factor in Christianity's self-understanding and success today. The strength of world Christianity lies in its creative interweaving of the warp of a world religion with the woof of its local contexts.

The increasing cultural diversity within Christianity, with the recognition of the local within the global and the global within the local, complicates the writing of church history in the twenty-first century. The days are gone when the history of

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## The strength of world Christianity lies in its interweaving of the warp of a world religion with the woof of local contexts.

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Christianity could be taught as the development of Western doctrine and institutions. Being in the middle of a large-scale transformation in the nature of Christianity, we do not yet have an adequate interpretive or even descriptive framework for what is happening. Australian historian Mark Hutchinson advocates a paradigm shift in the history of Christianity to a model of multiculturalism, a globalization of evangelicalism.<sup>24</sup> Others interpret worldwide growth as the spread of Pentecostalism, since the majority of growing churches today express themselves in Pentecostal worship styles.<sup>25</sup> A history-of-religions framework sees that the growing energy of Christianity has always been drawn from primal spirituality.<sup>26</sup> Sociologists have explored the spread of Christianity today as a process of modernization, a variant of the Weberian thesis in the growth of capitalism.<sup>27</sup> Historians influenced by liberation theology stress that the central focus of history should be the poor and marginalized rather than the ecclesiological elites of the Christendom model.<sup>28</sup> Liberation theology has a strong influence on the ongoing history projects of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

While each of these models has something to offer in helping us speak and teach about world Christianity, there is danger in theories of globalization that skip over the painstaking historical research necessary for each local context. Global analyses need to begin with local history, with the internal criteria of each movement as the starting point of our historical musings.<sup>29</sup> As with the outdated nomenclature of mission history, such as "younger churches," "developing churches," the "history of the expansion of Christianity," and so on, there is a constant temptation to define the changing global patterns in relation to the European and the North American experience.

The tension between the global and the local is not merely an academic exercise but is a struggle over identity. For example, some commentators are describing the growing world church as Pentecostal. Pentecostal and charismatic scholars want to claim the growth of world Christianity as part of their own missionary success.<sup>30</sup> Since Pentecostal phenomena were so derided in Western Christianity into the 1980s, it is understandable that Western Pentecostal scholars wish to include all phenomenologically similar movements as somehow related to Azusa Street. Anthropologists might similarly wish to describe new Christian movements as Pentecostal because of the prominence of common phenomena such as speaking in tongues, healing rituals, and the alleged marginalized social status of many adherents. For political liberals who look down on what they perceive to be narrow pietism, the word "Pentecostal" has been attractive as a negative descriptor, as part of an implied spillover from the Christian right in the United States.

For historians, however, unreflective use of the term "Pentecostalism" to summarize growing world Christianity has the same problem as calling all biblical Christianity "fundamentalism." It reduces local identity to a standardized set of criteria, in this case to phenomenology. Are Pentecostal phenomena the defining mark of identity for local practitioners, or are there other theological or communal identity markers that are more meaningful for them? Do all Pentecostal phenomena worldwide have an organic connection to Azusa Street and the missionary movement that spread from there, or is Pentecostal practice reflective of indigenous cultural initiative? Is the use of the word "Pentecostal" just the latest instance of categories originating from the North being used to explain and somehow take credit for what is going on in the South?

Non-Western historians are cautioning against blanket use of the word "Pentecostal" to describe indigenous Christianity. For example, Nigerian church historian Ogbu Kalu, head of the African history project for the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, has criticized the Pentecostal terminology as reflecting the dominance of anthropology in ignoring essential historical and theological differences among current movements. Kalu insists that historians be more accurate and recognize the differences that arise within the movements themselves.<sup>31</sup> Inus Daneel, the leading interpreter of African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe, argues vigorously against the label of Pentecostalism

being plastered onto indigenous churches. Not only have these churches been founded by African prophets, but they have recruited their members largely from the traditional population, not from so-called mission churches. Although they emphasize the Holy Spirit, the AICs deal with issues arising from African culture, not from Western Pentecostalism. To claim that AICs are otherworldly, for instance, ignores the holism that undergirds African religions.<sup>32</sup>

As scholars analyze and define what is happening in world Christianity today, we must apply such globalizing concepts as "Pentecostal" only after careful research into the local contexts.<sup>33</sup> Historians should take the lead in acknowledging the new Christianities as radically indigenous movements, not simply Pentecostalism or primal religiosity, or perhaps not even multicultural options within a global evangelicalism. Each movement should be studied from within its own internal logic, even as the universal nature of Christianity is recognizable in the construction of local identities. Popular Korean Christianity is a case in point. David Yonggi Cho leads the largest church in the world, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. Cho is by membership a Pentecostal, a minister in the Assemblies of God. Yet the emphasis of his congregation on material blessings and on such spiritualities as a prayer mountain is clearly attributable to the influence of Korean shamanism. Does Yoido Full Gospel Church exemplify globalized Pentecostalism or localized spirit religion? As historians work within the tensions between the global and the local that characterize indigenous world Christianities today, we should recognize that each form of twenty-first century Christianity represents a synthesis of global and local elements that has its own integrity.

As Christianity declines in Europe and grows in the South, historians need to recognize what the International Missionary Council saw in 1938: the future of world Christianity rests with the so-called younger churches and their daily struggles. Ultimately, the most interesting lessons from the missionary outreach during the Western colonial era is what happened to Christianity when the missionaries weren't looking, and after the colonizers withdrew. The challenge for historians lies in seeing beyond an extension of Western categories and into the hearts, minds, and contexts of Christ's living peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

## Notes

1. *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the Meeting of the International Missionary Council, Tambaram, Madras, India, Dec. 12-29, 1938* (London: International Missionary Council, 1939), p. 7.
2. In attendance were pioneer leaders like Bishop Azariah, the first Indian Anglican bishop, and Toyohiko Kagawa, advocate of Japanese social Christianity. There were up-and-coming theologians such as Christian Baeta of Gold Coast and D. T. Niles of Ceylon, both thirty years old. Young leaders of future social struggles included Chief Albert Luthuli, future president of the African National Congress and first African recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960, and Y. T. Wu, author of the controversial anti-Western Chinese Christian Manifesto in 1950. Women leaders included Mina Soga, social worker and the first African woman to attend an international conference, and Michi Kawai, noted Japanese educationist. For attendance list, see *ibid.*, pp. 187-201.
3. Statistics taken from David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 1 (January 2000): 24-25.
4. An earlier draft of this article was presented at the meeting of the American Society of Church History in Washington, D.C., on January 9, 1999. Following both the terminology of the New International Economic Order (Brandt Commission), and the geographic reality of where most churches are growing, I have chosen to speak here of Christianity in the "South." "North"/"South" nomenclature nevertheless contains imprecisions and inadequacies, as do the terms "West"/"East," "First World"/"Third World," or "First World"/"Two-Thirds World."
5. Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea* (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1986), pp. 8-10.
6. Rajah B. Manikam, ed., *Christianity and the Asian Revolution* (Madras: Joint East Asia Secretariat of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, 1954), p. 7.
7. Wilbert R. Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 2 (April 1996): 51. For a discussion of the relationship between missions and nationalism, see Dana L. Robert, "Christianity in the Wider World," part 6, in *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History*, 2d ed., Howard Kee and others (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1998), pp. 563-69.
8. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism in the late 1990s increased



- drastically the amount of anti-Christian violence. In Gujarat alone, sixty recorded incidents occurred in the second half of 1998 until Christmas, and roughly the same number occurred in the few weeks after (Thomas Quigley, "Anti-Christian Violence in India," *America*, April 3, 1999, p. 10).
9. "The Christian Manifesto: Direction of Endeavor for Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China," in *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China*, ed. Donald MacInnis (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 158–60.
  10. William R. Burrows, "Reconciling All in Christ: The Oldest New Paradigm for Mission," *Mission Studies* 15-1, no. 29 (1998): 86–87.
  11. On the church and the nation-state, see Andrew F. Walls, "Africa in Christian History—Retrospect and Prospect," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1, no. 1 (June 1998): 8–14.
  12. "Background Briefing, Lambeth Conference at a Glance," Anglican Communion News Service LC014, July 18, 1998.
  13. Bob Libby, "How Many Anglicans Are There?" *Lambeth Daily*, August 8, 1998, p. 4.
  14. Daniel H. Bays, "The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900–1937," in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Bays (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), p. 310.
  15. Robert, "Christianity in the Wider World," p. 570.
  16. Inus Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: An Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987), p. 49.
  17. Ibid.; Deji Ayegboyan and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Lagos, Nigeria: Greater Heights Publications, 1997); John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998).
  18. ZIRRCO Trust, *Annual Report* (Masvingo, Zimbabwe: n.p., 1997).
  19. Edward L. Cleary, O.P., *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), chap. 2.
  20. Samuel Huntington, cited by Paul Marshall, *Their Blood Cries Out: The Worldwide Tragedy of Modern Christians Who Are Dying for Their Faith*, introduction by Michael Horowitz (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997), p. 9. See specific studies, for example, Robert L. Youngblood, *Marcos Against the Church: Economic Development and Political Repression in the Philippines* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990); Jeffrey Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998); Enrique Dussel, "From the Second Vatican Council to the Present Day," in *The Church in Latin America 1492–1992*, ed. Dussel, *A History of the Church in the Third World*, vol. 1 (Tunbridge Wells, U.K.: Burns and Oates; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 153–82. For the struggle within Catholicism, see Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984); Penny Lernoux, *People of God: The Struggle for World Catholicism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).
  21. Mike Berg and Paul Pretiz, *The Gospel People* (Monrovia, Calif.: MARC and Latin America Mission, 1992); Guillermo Cook, ed., *New Face of the Church in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994).
  22. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).
  23. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989).
  24. Mark Hutchinson, "It's a Small Church After All," *Christianity Today*, November 16, 1998, pp. 46–49. Hutchinson is one of the leaders of the Currents in World Christianity Project, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, which seeks to understand the global spread of evangelicalism.
  25. Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997); Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1994); Allan Anderson, *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: Univ. of South Africa Press, 1992).
  26. Andrew Walls, "Origins of Old Northern and New Southern Christianity," in *Missionary Movement*, pp. 68–75. Sociologist Peter Berger of Boston University has led a research institute investigating the growth of world Protestantism as an aspect of economic culture.
  27. David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, foreword by Peter Berger (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1990).
  28. Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492–1979)*, trans. and revised by Alan Neely (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981); Dussel, *Church in Latin America*.
  29. Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," p. 56.
  30. Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan told the Eighteenth Pentecostal World Conference in 1998 that more than 25 percent of the world's Christians are Pentecostal or charismatic and that "the renewal will continue with increasing strength into the next millennium" ("Current News Summary," ReligionToday.com, October 5, 1998).
  31. Ogbu Kalu, "The Estranged Bedfellows: Demonization of the Aladura in African Pentecostalism," forthcoming in *African Christian Outreach: The AIC Contribution*, ed. M. L. Daneel (Pretoria: Univ. of South Africa Press, 2000).
  32. M. L. Daneel, "African Initiated Churches in Southern Africa: Protest Movements or Missionary Churches?" (paper presented at "Currents in World Christianity" conference, Cambridge Univ., July 15, 1999).
  33. One possible paradigm is to distinguish between largely urban, modernizing movements and rural, neo-traditionalist movements. In Singapore, for example, there are growing numbers of English-speaking, Internet-linked, young professional Pentecostals. These Christians are part of an international network replete with its own literature, hymnody, and global evangelistic consciousness. In rural Indonesia, however, nonliterate indigenous Christian movements, influenced by the spirit world of Javanese mysticism, are not connected to the nearby urban elites. (I am indebted to Graham Walker for this example.)

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